



**File Code:** 2810; 1950

**Date:** November 25, 2015

Dear Interested Party:

The USDA Forest Service has received a 2016 Surface Exploration Annual Work Plan from Hecla Greens Creek Mining Company (HGCMC). The Tongass National Forest will consider the proposal under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This activity falls within a category of actions established by the Chief of the Forest Service, which normally do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. Specifically, this decision may be categorically excluded under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(8), Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigation and their incidental support activities.

The Mining Law of 1872, as amended, provides the public right to identify and extract locatable mineral resources from public lands open to mineral entry. The Greens Creek Mine is an underground metals mine that has been operating continuously on Admiralty Island since 1987, with the exception of a temporary curtailment of operations from 1993 through 1996. The mine produces in excess of 2,000 tons of ore per day, which contains silver, zinc, lead and gold. As known mineral resources at the Greens Creek Mine are extracted, it becomes necessary to locate and identify new mineral resources as proposed in the 2016 Surface Exploration Annual Work Plan. The Greens Creek Mine employs approximately 300 personnel from local communities. Annual exploratory drilling for future mineral resources is fundamental to the sustained operation of the Greens Creek Mine.

Proposed activities include reconnaissance and detailed geological mapping, ground surveying, geochemical sampling (rocks, soils, and stream silts), and diamond drill core drilling. Drill cores will total approximately 10,000 feet (4 to 6 drill holes) distributed over a maximum of six (6) drill sites. These road and helicopter-supported activities entail minor surface disturbances including the felling and limbing of trees and shrubs to facilitate safe helicopter landing sites and construction of approximately 60' x 80' temporary drill sites. Cumulatively, up to approximately 0.55 acres of surface disturbance may occur. All equipment and materials will be removed when operations are complete. Sites will be rehabilitated to reduce visual impacts and stabilize any potential erosion, and then allowed to naturally regenerate vegetation. One helicopter, support personnel, and all field and drill crews will operate from the HGCMC camp and port facility at Hawk Inlet. An additional helicopter based in Juneau will be utilized for drill moves. Surface activities could commence as early as April and continue through the end of October 2016.

Some of the activities are located within the Greens Creek Inventoried Roadless Area and no temporary or permanent road construction is proposed. The proposed action is located within the Admiralty Island National Monument Non-Wilderness Land Use Designation (LUD) as identified in the 2008 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The



proposed activities are consistent with the Forest Plan LUDs as they allow for the development of mineral resources.

The 2016 Surface Exploration Annual Work Plan and other information, including maps and a table of drill sites, are available for review at the Admiralty National Monument office or on the Tongass National Forest website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/tongass/landmanagement/projects>.

As required by Forest Service notice, comment, and appeal regulations found at 36 CFR 218, this notice initiates a 30-day comment period for this action. The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide meaningful input on a proposed action implementing a land and resource management plan prior to a decision by the Responsible Official. In order to be most useful your comments should be provided by January 05, 2016 so we can incorporate them into the Decision Memo. Comments may be sent to:

Edward Gazzetti  
Admiralty Island National Monument  
8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801

Comments may also be emailed [comments-alaska-tongass-juneau@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-alaska-tongass-juneau@fs.fed.us) or faxed to 907-586-8808 with "2016 Greens Creek Exploratory Drilling" in the subject line.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact Edward Gazzetti, Minerals Hydrogeologist, at (907) 789-6276.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Chad Vanormer", with a stylized, cursive script.

CHAD VANORMER  
Monument Ranger